Highland RC, ranked #1 nationally in U-19, traveled to Colorado Springs for the initial match of their mini-tour Thursday. It was to be a battle of Highland's power and speed versus the unknown (outside of Colorado) quantity of the Grizzlies, who top their prep league table.

Action was joined immediately after kickoff as a Springs clearance kick from just beyond their 22 meter line went directly into touch, gifting the visitors with the lineout throwing, which they claimed cleanly. A few meters of mauling to establish their platform followed by a pair of short, crunching forward probes to determine the sturdiness of Colorado Springs defense, and the ball was spun wide along a well-populated backline.

Inside center Josh Faagalu passed and looped, creating an overlap for lanky lock Allai Matuapuaka. The second row forward exploited the advantage to touch down in the corner for a try converted by flyhalf Koby Harris: 7-0 at four minutes.

Highland got back on the attack after restart, employing pick-and-goes for short gains, and then sent the ball wide in search of the magic crease. But the Grizzlies were up to the task with stifling defense effecting adroit turnovers, and the home side brought the action to Highland via swift forward surges led by their backrowmen.

Standoff Michael Black spotted a gap in the line and he burst into space and Highland territory

before being brought to ground inside the 22 meter line. Springs' offsides at the breakdown enabled the cannon-legged Harris to boot the ball well into the Grizzly half of the field, relieving pressure and blunting the hosts' attack.

Furious action between the 10-meter-lines was controlled by Highland and they began a patient, methodical series of slippages which took them to Springs ten-meter-line before the ball was spun wide. The hotstepping Faagalu, showing exceptional pace, rocketed along the sideline 40 meters for a corner try and a 12-0 mark at 15.

Colorado Springs got on the board with a Nathan Fletcher penalty goal to make the score 12-3. Harris repaid the favor two minutes later with a penalty slot of his own to bring the numbers to 15-3. The home side got back on the front foot with intense forward work in close until they were awarded a penalty seven meters from goal. Ever-alert flanker Tyler Black quick-tapped and darted over the line to touch down, and with Fletcher's conversion, Colorado Springs drew to within five at the 27th minute, 15-10.

But Highland roared back, forcing the turnover at Springs 22 and spinning the ball to their well-stationed support line. Second row Cap Pauni was able to bull his way through congestion and into goal for the try at the halftime whistle for a midpoint margin of 20-10 to the visitors.

Though the second half featured fine displays of movement from both squads, no more points were tallied and the scoreline of 20-10 remained.

"I consider Colorado Springs to be the toughest side we've played this year," commented longtime Highland head coach Larry Gelwix - praise indeed from the man with 19 national championships under his belt.

Colorado Springs Head Coach John Paterson's assessment was understated as always: "Though we're yet a work in progress, we made positive steps in the right direction today."

Colorado Springs 10
Tries: Black

Convs: Fletcher
Pens: Fletcher

Highland
Tries: Matuapuaka, Faagalu, Pauni
Convs: Harris
Pens: Harris

Officials: J. Zevin, J. Lawson, W. Couch